Dear Alice,

The nail on my toe seems to have cut deeply into the skin and is bothering me. I also seem to have the signs of fungus (colored nail). What non-surgical methods exist to cure these?

Regards,

B.

Answer

Dear B,

What you describe sounds like an ingrown toenail when your toenail grows in a way that the edge presses against its adjacent skin, causing pain and discomfort. Ingrown toenails usually occur because of incorrect nail clipping and/or wearing tight shoes or stockings. After the nail grows inward, it is possible for an infection to occur. This can lead to some serious additional pain!

To prevent ingrown toenails in the first place, or their recurrence, cut your toenails straight across (the end of the toe nail should be angled) without trimming too close and cutting into, or damaging the skin at the corners of the nail. Don't tear off the nail; cut it neatly with scissors or nail clippers. Ingrown toenails are likely to recur, so preventative measures are neccessary to avoid pain.

Non-surgical treatment for an ingrown toenail is comprised of the following steps:

- Soften the nail by soaking the toe in warm water.
- Stop the nail from puncturing the skin by pushing a bit of absorbent cotton with an antibiotic ointment on it under the nail.
- Use over-the-counter pain relievers to lessen toe pain.
- Wear open-toed or shoes that have some extra room in the toes until the it heals.
- If the toe bleeds, excretes pus, or swells up, have it checked immediately by a health care provider. Oral antibiotics are often prescribed to treat a toenail infection.
If ingrown toenails are more severe and/or don't respond to at-home treatment, they may require medical attention. Left untreated, they can also lead to painful infections, so you may want to have it looked at by a health care provider.

Ingrown toenails and fungal infections are no fun. Practicing good nail hygiene and taking care of your feet may help you from toeing the line between healthy and painful digits!

Alice!
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